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Letter dated 20 May 2010 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the national report of France, entitled "Policies implemented by France with a view to achievement of the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to the promotion of women's rights and gender equality", prepared in preparation for the annual ministerial review to be held during the high-level segment of the 2010 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council under item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Gérard **Araud**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* E/2010/100.

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Annex to the letter dated 20 May 2010 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

Policies implemented by France with a view to achievement of the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to the promotion of women's rights and gender equality

Summary

The policies implemented by France at the national and international levels in order to promote women's rights and gender equality are fully in keeping with its international commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including Goal 3.

At the national level, while legal equality has been achieved and concrete progress has been made, particularly in terms of women's participation in professional life, many challenges remain to be met in order to achieve true equality in, for example, wages and access to decision-making posts, including in Parliament and in large corporations. Furthermore, violence against women remains unacceptable. The Government, in close cooperation with civil society, is taking a number of steps to address this situation with a focus on four areas:

- Combating poverty and insecurity;
- Promoting gender equality in employment;
- Combating violence against women; and
- Combating gender stereotypes.

More broadly, new impetus is now being given to implementation of a gender mainstreaming approach through the development of an Inter-ministerial Gender Equality Action Plan that will include some 20 priority areas and will set out, for each ministry, a series of prioritized commitments concerning women's access to positions of responsibility in politics, the economy and organizations; employment and wage equality; enjoyment of the right to, and respect for, dignity; and work-life balance.

At the international level, France is an active supporter of women's rights in international bodies and, in particular, of the proposal to set up a new Human Rights Council mechanism on laws and practices that discriminate against women as a complement to the existing mechanisms.

France is also involved in various regional cooperation programmes designed, for example, to support the promotion of women's rights.

In 2007, France adopted a gender strategy paper that seeks to bring about radical and lasting changes in gender relations and to make development programmes more effective, more relevant and more sustainable through a closer study of gender equality issues. To that end, two primary approaches are being followed: placing the reduction of gender inequalities at the heart of political dialogue and mainstreaming the goal of gender equality into all French cooperation policies and instruments.

In light of the results of these initiatives, it seems necessary to focus on strengthening efforts to improve women's legal status; promote their participation in public life; give them access to high-quality family planning services; and ensure their economic independence.

Part I
Policies and actions at the national level

France's policy for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality is fully in keeping with the country's international commitments:

- It endeavours to implement fully the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and
- It relies on the dual approach recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action:
  - The specific approach: corrective measures designed to correct or compensate for inequalities; and
  - The gender mainstreaming approach: in all public decision-making, systematic assessment of the planned decision's potential impact on gender equality.

The Department of Women's Rights and Gender Equality, which operates under the Directorate General of Social Cohesion (DGCS), is the national institutional mechanism responsible for setting, disseminating and implementing this policy; for all Ministry services and other relevant ministerial departments, it proposes measures for ensuring equality between girls and boys and between women and men in society as a whole.

The inter-ministerial dimension of this policy was recently strengthened as part of the establishment of the DGCS.

This was accompanied by creation of the post of inter-ministerial delegate for women's rights (a task assigned to the Director General, who is represented in these matters by the Chief of the Department of Women's Rights and Gender Equality).

The legislation establishing the DGCS makes it responsible for the operations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Women's Rights, established in 1982.

Inter-ministerial Gender Equality Action Plan

This new legislation also makes the DGCS responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this Inter-ministerial Action Plan. The Plan will make it possible to develop, adapt and implement appropriate programmes and innovative strategies and will be implemented at the regional level. It will cover all key areas of the gender equality policy:

- Women's access to positions of responsibility in politics, the economy and organizations;
- Employment and wage equality;
- Enjoyment of the right to, and respect for, dignity; and
- Work-life balance.

It will include some 20 priority areas for action and will set out, in a single document, a set of prioritized commitments for each ministry. This multi-year Action Plan will be launched in September 2010.

I. Preventing and combating poverty and insecurity among women

In 2007, the customarily measured income poverty rate[1] for the French population (over 8 million people) was 13.4 per cent; that rate is higher for women (14 per cent) than for men (12.8 per cent), particularly in the case of young (23.7 per cent and 20.4 per cent, respectively) and older (13.4 per cent and 8.9 per cent, respectively) persons.

This situation reflects the economic and social inequalities between women and men: women hold less-qualified and lower-paid jobs (two thirds of low-paid jobs are held by women) and 82 per cent of part-time jobs are held by women, who sometimes work much shorter hours and on fixed-term contracts.

As part of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, recommendations in two priority areas were made at interregional meetings organized by the Department of Women's Rights and Gender Equality in 2009:

A. Better prevention

- Gain a better understanding of and analyse the causes of insecurity;
- Require the production of gender-disaggregated statistics, including on employment and unemployment;
- Conduct gender research;
- Put the issue into better perspective at the international level by using the embassy network to survey situations, contexts and good practices and by sharing research, statistics and European good practices;
- Develop forward-looking strategies;
- Facilitate access to culture and participation in urban society;
- Give women opportunities for professional growth;
- Improve the quality of part-time work;
- Expand and better publicize the existing mechanisms;
- Make businesses and State administrations responsible for preventing insecurity and involve professional associations and trade unions;
- Improve the recognition and identification of vulnerable populations;
- Restore self-esteem and independence; offer psychological support and help job applicants prepare for interviews; and
- Expand employment counselling services (particularly for active solidarity income beneficiaries).

[1] The percentage of individuals living below the poverty line, which, in Europe, is defined as 60 per cent of the median standard of living (in France, in 2007: €908).

B. Better treatment

- Improve support and assistance measures;
- Make it easier to find and remain in housing;
- Make it easier to find good jobs;
- Give women in insecure situations better access to health care and regular check-ups;
- Harmonize and better coordinate the announcement of public policies and measures;
- Conduct multidisciplinary and complementary activities;
- Strengthen inter-ministerial initiatives in areas such as public education, employment, health, social cohesion and immigration; and
- Involve national agencies, local communities, social partners and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the programmes conducted.

II. Promoting gender equality in employment

The increase in the number of working women over the past 40 years marks a major change in French society; there are now almost as many women as men in the workforce. However, inequalities persist:

- The unemployment rate is higher for women;
- Far more women than men are working part-time, often without having chosen to do so;
- Young women hold a wider variety of jobs and integration of the sexes has increased in some highly skilled professions; the gender gap has, however, widened in unskilled labour. Women clearly predominate in some service jobs (home care, domestic and childcare workers) and in the fields of education, health care and social work. Over half of all jobs held by women are concentrated within 12 of the 86 job categories. These inequalities are a result of the channelling of young people into different fields of study, which is still heavily gender-based;
- Women's and men's careers are different at every stage of their working lives; overall, more men than women are promoted and change jobs; and
- The sum of these inequalities results in major wage gaps. Overall, women earn 27 per cent less than men;[2] if only the wages of full-time workers are considered, the average net annual wage for women working in the private and semi-public sectors was 19.1 per cent less than that of men in 2007.

In order to combat these inequalities, the Government is implementing an active policy, in close cooperation with its social partners, with the following goals:

[2] Ministry of Labour statistics for 2006.

A. Expand girls' academic and career options at the primary and secondary school levels

The second agreement on gender equality in the educational system was signed by nine ministers on 29 June 2006. It provides a road map for the period ending in 2011 and includes three priority areas, the first of which seeks to improve academic and career guidance for girls and boys in order to improve their job prospects by:

- Producing studies and statistics on career guidance and hiring for girls and boys; and
- Taking the gender perspective into account in providing information on courses of study and careers and encouraging efforts to channel girls into the scientific, technological and professional fields.

The Scientific and Technical Careers for Girls Prize:

In order to encourage diversification in career choices and gender equality in scientific and technical fields of study, affirmative action for girls is being introduced by the ministry in charge of public policy on women's rights and equality through the Scientific and Technical Careers for Girls Prize.

The Prize, established in 1991, grants awards in the amount of €1,000 to 650 recipients throughout France, the applicants having been considered by regional juries.

The purpose of this Prize is to encourage girls in the final year of general, technical, vocational or agricultural secondary school, whether they are enrolled in a public school or a private school under contract, in France or abroad, to select a scientific or technological course of university study in which the percentage of girls is 40 per cent or less.

More broadly, it is necessary to promote equality of opportunity between women and men in employment and to recognize achievements in the scientific and technical fields.

A performance indicator has been established within the framework of the Financial Legislation Organization Act in order to assess the impact of the Prize. This indicator is consistent with the one used by the Ministry of Education, which has set the goal of increasing the percentage of girls graduating from secondary school with scientific and technological diplomas from 37.5 per cent in 2004 to 45 per cent in 2010.

Third priority area: Mainstreaming gender equality into the professional and pedagogical practice of all teachers in the educational system:

- Training for teachers; and
- Mainstreaming equality into school projects.

B. Pursue the goal of employment and wage equality between men and women through social dialogue and implementation of the Law on Equal Wages for Women and Men of 23 March 2006

Employment and wage equality between men and women is not only a democratic and social issue, but also an economic one. The French Government therefore plans to continue and increase its efforts to achieve this goal.

The Law on Equal Wages for Women and Men of 23 March 2006 establishes, inter alia, that businesses and professional associations must negotiate measures aimed at eliminating wage gaps between women and men by 31 December 2010.

In November 2009, in order to facilitate the implementation of this provision, the Government provided its social partners with a guidance document that urged them to consider three areas of employment equality reform:

- Simplifying rules;
- Promoting better jobs for women in business; and
- Giving themselves the means to implement the Law.

The social partners, for their part, said that they wished to negotiate on the issues of:

- Part-time work;
- Part-time work for workers with family responsibilities and establishment of a work-life balance mechanism;
- Conditions for collective bargaining on this issue; and
- Women's representation in staff unions.

During the second half of 2010, the Government will be ready to submit a reform proposal incorporating the outcome of these negotiations.

Comparative status report:

Since the adoption of the Law of 13 July 1983, Government departments and businesses have been required to prepare annual comparative status reports on the employment and training conditions of women and men. These reports, which are submitted to the works council and transmitted to trade union representatives, provide an opportunity to set goals for progress in the area of employment equality and to discuss goals that have been set but not achieved. They also serve as a basis for collective bargaining.

In order to help businesses prepare this comparative status report, guidelines have been posted on the Ministry of Labour website.

So that businesses with fewer than 50 employees can easily obtain statistics on the status of women and men in the areas of employment, training and wage equality, an experiment is being conducted with 14,900 companies that are being provided with a simplified comparative status report on women and men.

The equality label

It is important that legislation for the promotion of gender equality in employment should be accompanied by incentive mechanisms. The equality label is intended to serve as such a mechanism by recognizing and promoting the exemplary measures introduced by companies to foster gender equality in employment.

The label is awarded on the basis of a set of criteria, less detailed in the case of entities with fewer than 50 employees, which cover three main areas:

- Actions taken within the company to promote equality in employment, for example, signing company agreements with social partners or running information- and awareness-raising campaigns on gender diversity and equality for managers and employees;
- Human resource and company management: steps taken to promote wage equality for men and women, equal access by women and men to continuing professional development, and gender diversity in the company's various decision-making bodies;
- Support for parenting in the work environment: measures that make it easier to combine work and family life, such as the introduction of flexible working hours; arrangements for taking and returning from maternity and parental leave; and support for childcare.

Applications are first examined by AFNOR Certification; then a certification committee consisting of five Government representatives, five trade union representatives and five representatives of employers' organizations decides whether the label should be awarded.

The label is valid for three years; an interim inspection is carried out after 18 months to verify that the company still meets the required certification criteria.

Forty-six entities of various sizes and in different sectors (industrial firms, banks, consulting firms, insurance companies, associations and local authorities), with almost 800,000 employees in total, have been awarded the equality label.

C. Promote the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making bodies of public and private enterprises

A bill that has been adopted by the National Assembly and should soon be debated in the Senate aims to establish quotas for women (eventually 40 per cent) on the boards of directors or supervisory boards of private, public and Government-owned corporations.

D. Encourage more women to start or take over a business

In France, according to a survey conducted in 2000, women accounted for 50 per cent of the 13 million French nationals who wanted to start a business. In the same year, however, women were responsible for only 29 per cent of company start-ups or takeovers.

For that reason, the French authorities are seeking to encourage more women to start or take over a business by:

- Expanding access to bank credit through the Guarantee Fund for the Start-up, Takeover and Development of Businesses by Women (FGIF); and
- Ensuring that women are included in and taken into account by business start-up assistance mechanisms.

E. Promote work-life balance

As a result of its strong pro-family policy, which enables women to continue working when they have children, France combines a high fertility rate (1.99 children per woman in 2009) with large amounts of women in the workforce. This policy has four main objectives:

(1) Help women return to work after giving birth to or adopting a child;

(2) Give parents the option of working part-time if they wish to do so;

(3) Support companies that make efforts to help their employees balance their family and work responsibilities;

(4) Develop and diversify the types of childcare facilities available: in accordance with the commitments made by the President of the Republic in February 2009, the goal is to make an additional 200,000 childcare slots available by 2012 through a combination of group and individual childcare facilities. More specifically, a call for projects has been launched as part of the "hope for the suburbs" initiative in order to develop flexible types of childcare suited to constraints such as staggered working hours and insecure employment.

III. Preventing and combating violence against women

A. Key data on violence against women

- The first national survey on violence against women in France (ENVEFF) was conducted from March to July 2000 on a sample of 6,970 women between the ages of 20 and 59. It showed, inter alia, that over the previous 12 months almost one woman in ten had been subjected to verbal, psychological, physical or sexual violence by a partner or former partner; by extrapolation, this means that 1,350,000 women had faced intimate partner violence.
- A national study on violent death in the context of an intimate partner relationship has been conducted annually since 2005. It shows that 156 women — an average of one woman every two and a half days — died at the hands of a partner or former partner in 2008.

- An initial assessment of the economic impact of domestic violence put its total cost at over 1 billion euros in 2004. According to the preliminary conclusions of a study on estimating the economic impact of domestic violence in Europe,[3] the cost of such violence in France in 2006 was close to €2.5 billion, including direct medical costs of €483 million.
- An estimated 55,000 women and girls have been subjected to or threatened with female genital mutilation in France.
- Statistics on the number of forced marriages are very difficult to obtain; however, according to estimates by specialist associations, 70,000 girls between the ages of 10 and 18 are at risk of forced marriage in France.

B. Recent legislation

Since 1992, France has adopted various acts specifically aimed at combating violence against women, including:

- The Divorce Act of 26 May 2004, which provides for the eviction of a violent spouse from the marital home under civil law (applicable as from 1 January 2005);
- The Act of 12 December 2005 on repeat offenders, which facilitates the eviction of a violent spouse or partner from the victim's home under criminal law;
- The Act of 4 April 2006 reinforcing the prevention and punishment of intimate partner violence and violence against minors, which establishes heavier penalties for violence against women:
  - By expanding the list of aggravating factors to include new groups of perpetrators (civil partners and former partners) and new offences (murders and rapes); thus, marital rape is now covered by the Penal Code as a form of sexual assault; and
  - By recognizing theft from a spouse where there is a clear desire to control the victim.

This Act also contains provisions facilitating the persecution of forced marriages and female genital mutilation.

C. Framework for action and recent Government measures

Two inter-ministerial three-year plans for combating violence against women have been formulated. At the end of the first plan (2005-2007), entitled "10 Measures for Women's Autonomy", which focused in particular on intimate partner violence (such as more extensive training for relevant professionals and entitlement to unemployment benefits for women who quit their jobs as a result of intimate partner violence), a second comprehensive action plan was adopted on 23 November 2007.

[3] Carried out by representatives of France, Denmark, Spain and Hungary under the European programme, DAPHNE III (2007-2013).

National Action Plan: "12 Goals for Combating Violence Against Women" (2008-2010)

The Plan strengthens the measures already implemented and supplements them by launching new initiatives aimed at people close to the victim (the perpetrators of intimate partner violence and the children exposed to such violence).

It has four main priorities: measuring levels of violence; preventing violence; coordinating response; and protecting the victims, for example by:

- Creating "liaison" positions at the local level to serve as an easily accessible single point of contact for women victims of intimate partner violence;
- Improving the assistance and shelter offered to women in difficult circumstances, especially through housing and social reintegration centres (CHRS);
- Allocating more resources for the 3919 helpline (free telephone number for women victims of intimate partner violence, launched on 14 March 2007 and run by a non-governmental organization (NGO) with State funding);
- Issuing, in 2008, the first set of recommendations for professionals and Government bodies on the care of children exposed to intimate partner violence;
- Drawing up, also in 2008, a charter of shared principles for all agencies dealing with perpetrators of violence, and then distributing to police stations and community legal centres an information and awareness-raising booklet for identified perpetrators with a view to preventing them from reoffending; and
- Reissuing the pamphlet for professionals, "Combating intimate partner violence: the role of professionals".

D. Three-year communication campaign and "2010 national priority concern"

On 2 October 2008, a three-year information and awareness-raising campaign on all aspects of violence against women was launched in order to open people's eyes to the problem and encourage them to talk about it more freely. This campaign, which focused on intimate partner violence in the first year, broadened its scope in 2009 to include forced marriage and female genital mutilation. In 2010, it will focus on the impact of intimate partner violence on children.

In addition, on 25 November 2009 the Prime Minister stated that efforts to combat violence against women would be the "2010 national priority concern". A television advertisement and a public information campaign on the issue will be run. This official recognition will highlight the involvement of not-for-profit associations.

E. Outlook

The 2008-2010 three-year plan will be given fresh impetus, especially through:

- A new survey on violence against women, based on the ENVEFF model, and ongoing efforts to compile statistics and conduct research on forced marriages;
- An information campaign aimed at professionals, especially those working with new first-time immigrants;
- Establishment of an interim protection system — allowing action to be taken before a complaint is filed — which will enable at-risk women to benefit from immediate protection measures in emergency situations;
- Criminalization of psychological violence, which will in future be considered as an offence;
- Experimentation with electronic tagging devices (such as electronic bracelets); and
- A specific training course on situations involving intimate partner violence, to be offered systematically to professionals likely to encounter such cases. Health-care professionals (doctors, midwives and nurses) will in future take this specific course as part of their initial training.

IV. Combating gender stereotypes

No gender equality policy can succeed without efforts to eradicate stereotypes regarding the images and roles traditionally assigned to women and men in society.

This is why the second priority area in the above-mentioned agreement on gender equality in the educational system seeks to ensure that young people receive education on gender equality by:

- Including the role of women and men in society as a topic on school curricula; and
- Preventing and combating gender-based violence.

Furthermore, given the power of the visual image, the stereotypical and sometimes degrading ways in which women are portrayed in the media hinder progress towards gender equality. The potential impact of such images on efforts to prevent violence against women, and the fact that girls build their self-identity on, inter alia, the images conveyed by the media, should not be overlooked. Action is being taken at the national and local level to address this problem:

– *At the national level*:

In the area of advertising, a self-regulatory mechanism negotiated with the Government was established in December 2003, when a joint declaration on respect for the human being in advertising was signed between the Ministry responsible for women's rights and the French advertising standards authority. The Committee on the Image of Women in the Media has been made responsible for monitoring the media on an annual basis and establishing a culture of self-regulation regarding its portrayal of women by means of a framework of monitoring indicators. To this end, the Committee is required to submit an annual progress report; the regulatory

authorities are also involved. In addition, there are plans to expand media education and the analysis of gender stereotypes;

– *At the local level:*

Measures have been taken to raise awareness of media images of women, often in conjunction with education on respect, gender diversity and equality between boys and girls; these include conferences, debates, a radio broadcast and the award of the "Faham" and "Infame" ("best" and "worst") prizes to combat the use of denigrating images of women in advertising.

Part II
Policies and actions implemented at the international level in order to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women

French policies on the protection of women's rights and development cooperation are in keeping with the MDGs and especially with Goal 3 on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, which reaffirms the need for States to pursue policies that promote gender equality in all areas.

I. Protecting women's rights and combating violence against women

A. Active support for efforts to combat violence against women through participation in international and European bodies

France's efforts to combat violence against women have, in particular, taken the form of actions and commitments within the United Nations, the European Union and the International Organisation of La Francophonie, and the implementation of specific programmes.

For several years, France has been playing an active role in the adoption of international instruments and international commitments for the protection and promotion of women's rights. For example, it contributed to the adoption of Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security (resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009)), which affirm that women, who are often the main victims of armed conflict, can play a key role in peacemaking and post-conflict reconstruction. A national action plan is being drafted in order to ensure the ambitious, practical implementation of these resolutions; it should be adopted in the course of 2010. Since 2006, France has also played a leadership role, together with the Netherlands, in the adoption of an annual General Assembly resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Furthermore, France proposed in 2009 that the Human Rights Council should establish a new mechanism on laws and practices that discriminate against women as a complement to the existing mechanisms. Such a mechanism would enable the Council to follow up the recommendations and conclusions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, disseminate good practices, provide States with expertise and conduct visits, as appropriate or at the request of the States concerned.

In March 2010, at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, French diplomats contributed to the adoption of a ministerial declaration on violence against women by the International Organisation of La Francophonie, which reaffirmed in particular that all human rights violations perpetrated against women and girls must be resolutely combated and that violence against women and girls is the ultimate form of gender-based discrimination.

Lastly, France supports the activities of the International Criminal Court, the establishment of which represented an important milestone in terms of prosecuting these crimes and combating impunity. In the Statute of the Court not only rape, but also sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or "any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity", are defined for the first time as crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Similar action is being taken at the European level. During its presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2008, France, in its work on human rights, gave priority to the promotion and protection of women's rights. This focus led to the adoption of European Union guidelines on violence against women (December 2008), which serve as a road map for the entire European diplomatic network and for the European Union's external action.

B. Renewed impetus to strengthen the role of women in society in the Euro-Mediterranean region

The ministers responsible for women's rights and gender equality in the 43 States members of the Union for the Mediterranean met on 11-12 November 2009 in Marrakech under the joint chairmanship of Egypt and France. They adopted conclusions on "strengthening the role of women in society", in which the Euro-Mediterranean partners, in accordance with their international obligations, reiterated their commitment to promote de jure and de facto equality between men and women and to respect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women as well as men. These conclusions stress that "equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life is a crucial element of democracy. Only by the inclusion of all and determined actions will the Euro-Mediterranean region's women be able to fulfil their ambitions and aspirations and, by extension, contribute towards the attainment of a common area of peace, stability and shared prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region". In the same conclusions, the "ministers encourage partners to come forward with concrete projects, and welcome that [...] new projects have been proposed for the Union for the Mediterranean", including the "Foundation of Women for the Mediterranean" (presented jointly by France, Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco).

This project aims to establish a location, recognized both by the institutions and by actors on the ground, which will allow communication between them in preparing and implementing coordinated and coherent actions that target women in the Mediterranean region, prioritizing long-term ongoing projects. The aim is to bring together and coordinate the efforts and resources currently deployed in order to leverage the efficiency of the actions taken. The Foundation's mission will be:

- To serve as a location where all existing knowledge and research (academic, institutional, public and private) on gender equality can be compiled and centralized;
- To facilitate the sharing of best practices; and
- To establish a network of women's networks around the Mediterranean.

C. Implementation of specific cooperation programmes for combating violence against women

France is conducting and contributing to multiple regional cooperation programmes, including, inter alia:

Support for advancement of the rights of women and the family in the Arab world (Maghreb and Mashreq) (2004-2008)

This project, implemented at a cost of €2,032,000, was carried out in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Implementation began in December 2004 and concluded in December 2008.

The programme was designed to help create an enabling environment for the promotion, protection and enjoyment of the rights of women and the family in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian Territories. Its primary purpose was to strengthen the knowledge, awareness, information and capacities of institutions and NGOs in the field of women's rights by, inter alia, carrying out studies on legislation, establishing an easily accessible database in order to promote women's rights, establishing a network of partners and implementing pilot projects in each of the six countries concerned.

This project facilitated, inter alia:

- Establishment of the Anaruz network in Morocco (a national network of crisis centres for women victims of violence);
- Launching of a national strategy for combating violence against women in Algeria;
- Establishment of an Observatory for the Family in Tunisia;
- Strengthening the capacities of the National Commission for Lebanese Women;
- Women's rights training for Jordanian women police officers; and
- Support for the activities of women's associations in the Palestinian Territories.

Protection of children in armed conflict

This project, implemented at a cost of €2 million and launched in 2008, aims to improve the protection of children in armed conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa (Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda) and in Central and East Africa (the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan). Through three components (protection and assistance; prevention and awareness; and capacity-building), special attention is being paid to the issue of young girls as victims of armed conflict.

Strengthening local human rights associations' influence and action capacity

This project, conducted in partnership with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) with €2.3 million in funding, was launched in early 2007 in 43 countries in the priority solidarity zone. It follows an earlier cooperation project on a similar theme that was conducted with FIDH from May 2003 to April 2006.

One component aims, inter alia, to provide needed tools to human rights organizations through training and information and experience networks so that they can contribute to national, regional and international discussions on human rights, including on key issues related to the rights of women.

As part of this project, three NGO representatives from the Niger, Mozambique and Yemen were able to participate in sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in May and July 2007, and shadow reports on the situation of women's rights in those countries were submitted to the Committee.

Support for Establishment of the Rule of Law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Implemented at a cost of €3 million with a funding agreement signed in November 2005, this project aims to help establish the rule of law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to restore its institutional capacities. One of its components seeks to promote human rights through the systematic training of magistrates, police and civil society leaders with an emphasis on, inter alia, women's rights. Therefore, many activities have been organized on the theme of violence against the especially vulnerable (women and children), such as the staging of a play about sexual violence which was filmed and broadcast on Congolese television.

In 2008, a call for human rights proposals led to support for four women's rights projects submitted by civil society organizations in the Congo, Laos, Morocco and Afghanistan.

II. Gender equality in French cooperation efforts: women as development stakeholders

French cooperation supports initiatives and measures taken in the context of the MDGs (including Goal 3, in order to promote gender equality and empower women).

Generally speaking, women would see a significant improvement in their situation if the MDGs were achieved because it is primarily women who suffer from the shortcomings and obstacles that the Goals seek to overcome.

In particular:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day;
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (five years);
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than by 2015; and
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio between 1990 and 2015.

A. Strategy supported by the 2000-2010 Plan of Action of the Secretary of State for Cooperation and La Francophonie

The gender strategy paper adopted in December 2007 is central to French gender policy in the context of its development cooperation efforts. The French approach aims to create conditions allowing women and men to challenge their social institutions and the resulting social relations between the sexes so that they can make progress towards greater social justice and equality in all areas of society — the economic, political and social spheres — so that formal equality is achieved and becomes substantive equality.

This approach is organized around two objectives:

1. To bring about radical, lasting changes in gender relations in order to ensure respect for the rights and fundamental freedoms of both sexes; and

2. To achieve greater effectiveness, relevance and sustainability in development policies and programmes by mainstreaming a more accurate analysis of gender issues and the power relations upon which they depend.

In order to achieve these goals, France commits itself to a coherent approach focusing on two main areas:

- Placing reduction of gender inequalities at the centre of the political dialogue by engaging in or encouraging strong political advocacy in support of gender equality and the protection of universal rights in bilateral and multilateral forums; and

- Ensuring a cross-cutting gender equality approach in all the French cooperation policies, areas of engagement and instruments that give it meaning.

In December 2008, Alain Joyandet, Secretary of State for Cooperation and La Francophonie, launched an Action Plan on women and equality entitled "Women as Development Stakeholders", which emphasizes, inter alia, women's activity in the economic sector and the role of gender equality as a condition for growth and development. The Plan provides human and financial resources (€30 million) within the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) for the implementation of specific, cross-cutting activities.

The outcome of the initiatives launched by the Secretary of State was announced at the January 2010 Gender Equality and Development Platform. The Platform brings together a number of partners (the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of France, the Parity Observatory, the Ministry of Labour, AFD and the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF)). It plays an advisory role in guiding and monitoring French international cooperation and development policy.

A network of gender liaisons has been set up within French embassies abroad. A survey of funds managed by French embassies abroad and used to finance local associations for the year 2009-2010 indicates that France provides €4,800,000 in support of projects in 17 countries in the priority solidarity zone for women's associations and efforts to promote gender equality on themes as diverse and complementary as access to health care, HIV prevention, education, professional training and governance.

In 2010-2011, the French Embassy in Mali, for example, used 75 per cent of its gender funding for the "strengthening the role of women's associations in neighbourhoods" and "support for micro-enterprise" components.

This survey has heightened the visibility of the embassies' efforts to promote equality through support to local associations.

One specific fund (financed by the Priority Solidarity Fund), entitled "Gender and the Economy: Women as Development Stakeholders", has the goal of promoting effective gender equality in economic activity and promoting the personal, economic and decision-making empowerment of women entrepreneurs and manufacturers in West Africa. It began its activities in October 2009, will run for three years and is involved in three areas:

- Support for promising economic projects;
- Technical and organizational capacity-building for women and women's organizations; and
- Support for advocacy to promote broader participation by women in governance and improving gender mainstreaming in anti-poverty policies.

The Fund mobilizes a variety of stakeholders: 14 French NGOs and their 30 partners in countries of the South are implementing 11 projects in seven West African countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Senegal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in two promising economic sectors: food processing; and handicrafts and small-scale trading.

- Gender and development training sessions have been organized for French NGOs and for AFD.
- Calls for proposals, to be funded in the amount of €4.5 million, sent to French NGOs by AFD during the period 2009-2010, mainstreamed gender as a selection factor. In 2009, co-financing in the amount of €3 million was provided to NGOs. These projects also mainstream gender as a selection factor.
- AFD finances a mother-and-child centre in Kabul, which opened in 2009, and a water supply project in Burkina Faso at a cost of €10 million.

France supports the United Nations agencies that work specifically on gender issues. It is the eighteenth largest donor to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), contributing some €2 million annually, and was the twelfth largest donor to UNIFEM in 2007.

B. Gender mainstreaming issues and challenges in our international efforts

Globally, efforts to improve the status of women and promote respect for their rights should be strengthened in the most pivotal areas of their lives by:

- Opening doors in public life and ensuring their participation in governance as development stakeholders;
- Improving their legal status;

- Giving them access to high-quality family planning services; and
- Improving their financial independence and contributing to their economic well-being.

Improving legal status and increasing participation in governance

1. Despite the international legal framework, there is still a gap between formal and substantive equality that has an impact on women's lives. The reservations formulated by some countries upon ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women greatly limit its implementation at the national level. While international, regional and national regulatory frameworks make increasingly frequent reference to the need for gender equality, women's rights are sometimes undermined in the name of cultural relativism.

Withdrawal of reservations to the Convention by all countries, reform of family codes and development of national gender equality policies in all sectors and of effective mechanisms for combating gender-based violence, forced marriage, early marriage, female sexual mutilation and violence in school are considered priorities.

Women's participation in political and economic governance (including in professional associations) must be promoted. This entails capacity-building for women in specific substantive areas as well as in public speaking and negotiation skills. Strengthening women's networks is one way to achieve these goals.

Strengthening the capacities of francophone women is a priority of French action in cooperation with the OIF. In 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Gender in Action Network which brings together francophone women's and gender experts' associations from the South and the North by means of a live Internet platform. The Network plays a networking and advisory role and advocates for francophone women in regional and international political forums. It also promotes capacity-building for women's associations and makes its expertise available to the authorities in francophone countries. It is supported by the OIF.

Exchanges on gender between anglophone and francophone countries of the North and South, particularly in gender-specific exchange and cooperation venues such as the Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET) of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and through networks of experts, are necessary and represent a rich resource.

Access to high-quality family planning services

From 1999 to 2005, the maternal mortality rate fell by 1 per cent per year, which is far from the 5.5 per cent per year necessary to achievement of Goal 5 of the MDGs. Strides have been made in reducing maternal mortality in over 100 countries thanks to the strengthening and expansion of proven cost-effective mechanisms: family planning, the presence of qualified birth attendants and availability of and access to emergency obstetrical care. But this progress is not equal across regions: from 1990 to 2005, maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa fell by just 2 per cent while in Asia, the figure for the same period was 20 per cent.

Efforts to reduce maternal and child mortality and achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health care, contraceptives and abortion must become development priorities for the next 10 years. Strategies for reducing maternal mortality require a more comprehensive approach to gender, protection of gender equality and improvement of the status of women in society. Without these, maternal mortality prevention strategies are ineffective. There is, for example, a link between access to education, early marriage and access to reproductive and sexual health care. (In Benin, 95 per cent of women with three years or more of schooling see a doctor during pregnancy.)

Economic independence

Gender inequalities affect the economic growth and development of countries in the North as well as the South and hamper poverty reduction efforts. Research by economists highlights the strong correlation between gender equality and economic growth. The trend shows that poverty rates are falling in countries where gender relations are more egalitarian.

There is a "virtuous circle": reduction of inequalities improves women's access to education, training and health care, which in turn improves their access to economic resources such as capital, land and infrastructures, thereby fostering their increased productivity and stimulating growth. At the same time, a strengthening of their political role supports and consolidates these gains over the long term.

Thus, efforts to give women equal access to and control of the means of production, including land, professional training, credit and economic governance opportunities, must be strengthened. At the same time, the gender approach makes it possible to challenge work schedules, the burden of housework and household financial management in order to promote a better distribution of tasks between women and men in society. These changes are inevitable as women are now working in larger and larger numbers, particularly in response to the financial crisis. These are the goals pursued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Gender and Economic Development in Africa project.

In this context, greater cooperation with the African Development Bank (ADB), which supports programmes for women, would add significant value.

Joint work with the specialized agencies of the United Nations for gender issues such as UNFPA and UNIFEM, as well as with regional agencies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the ADB and the OECD Development Assistance Committee, is a way to promote gender mainstreaming in our work.

Overall, mainstreaming equality goals within each sectoral policy is a precondition for ensuring access to development by women and men. It is essential to provide better training for professionals and establish specific results indicators within bilateral and multilateral programmes and policies. Reforming our practices through gender mainstreaming is an ambitious and necessary challenge.